

**Australian Evangelical Lutheran Church**  
**BETHLEHEM TOOWOOMBA, OUR SAVIOUR LOWOOD, ST JOHN'S AUBIGNY,**  
**ST PAUL'S GREENWOOD, TRINITY MARBURG, TRINITY OAKY**  
25 December Christmas Day

**HYMNS:** 627 630 632 26

**INTROIT:** Psalm 2

Why have the nations been restless, and why do the peoples plot for no purpose?

The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers conspire together, against the LORD and against His Anointed One,

“Let us tear up their chains and throw their ropes away from us!”

The One enthroned in heaven laughs. The LORD ridicules them.

Then He speaks to them in His anger and terrifies them in His glowing anger, saying:

“Nevertheless, I Myself have consecrated My King on Zion, My holy mountain.”

“I shall proclaim the decree of the LORD: He has said to Me: ‘You are My Son. Today I have begotten You.

“Ask Me, that I may make the nations Your inheritance and the ends of the earth Your property.

“You will break them with an iron rod. You will smash them to pieces like a vessel of pottery.”

Now therefore, kings, act with insight! Take advice, judges of the earth! Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling!

Fervently kiss the Son, that He may not become angry, and that you may not perish in your way! For His anger may blaze up in a short time.

Blessed are all who take refuge in Him!

**COLLECT:** Almighty God, grant that the birth of Your only-begotten Son in the flesh may set us free from the bondage of sin; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

*Welcome to all worshipping with us!*

Pastor Peter Ziebell, Phone 0407583922.

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***Please notify pastor of anyone who is unwell or in need of a visit.***

**READINGS:** Isaiah 52:7-10 The good news of salvation  
Hebrews 1:1-12 God has spoken to us by His Son.  
John 1:1-14 The Word in creation, revelation, and saving grace.

### **Isaiah 52:7-10**

<sup>7</sup> How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the messenger who brings the good news, who announces peace, who tells the good news of good things, who proclaims salvation and who tells Zion, “Your God is King!” <sup>8</sup> Listen! Your watchmen have raised their voices and they are shouting together joyfully. For eye to eye they will see it when the LORD returns to Zion. <sup>9</sup> Be happy and shout joyfully together, you ruins of Jerusalem! For the LORD has comforted His people. He has redeemed Jerusalem. <sup>10</sup> The LORD has made bare His holy arm in the sight of all the nations and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.

### **Hebrews 1:1-12**

<sup>1</sup> God has long ago spoken at many times and in many ways to our fathers by the prophets, <sup>2</sup> but He has in these last days spoken to us by His Son. He has made Him the Heir of all things and through Him He has also made the universe. <sup>3</sup> The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being. He maintains all things by His powerful Word. After He had made purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

<sup>4</sup> He has become as much greater than the angels are as the name that He has inherited is superior to theirs. <sup>5</sup> For to which of the angels has God ever said, “You are My Son. Today I have begotten You”? Or again, “I shall be His Father and He will be My Son”? <sup>6</sup> Again, when God brings His First-born Son into the world, He says: “And let all the angels of God worship Him!” <sup>7</sup> With reference to the angels He says, “Who makes His angels spirits and His servants flames of fire.” <sup>8</sup> However, to the Son He says: “Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever; and the sceptre of uprightness is the sceptre of Your kingdom. <sup>9</sup> You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore, God, Your God, has put You above Your companions by anointing You with the Olive-Oil of gladness.” <sup>10</sup> He also says, “Lord, in the beginning You laid the foundation of the earth and the heavens are the works of Your hands. <sup>11</sup> They will perish, but You continue. They will all become old like a garment. <sup>12</sup> You will roll them up like a robe and like a garment and they will be changed. However, You are the same and Your years will not come to an end.”

## **John 1:1-14**

<sup>1</sup> In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> Everything was made through Him and not one thing that was made was made without Him. <sup>4</sup> In Him was life and the Life was the Light of mankind. <sup>5</sup> The Light is shining in the dark and the darkness has not understood it. <sup>6</sup> A man came, whom God sent and whose name was John. <sup>7</sup> He came to testify, that is, to testify about the Light so that through Him everyone might believe. <sup>8</sup> He was not the Light but came to witness about the Light. <sup>9</sup> The genuine Light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup> He was in the world and He made the world and the world did not know Him. <sup>11</sup> He came to His own and His own people did not receive Him. <sup>12</sup> However, to all who received Him, who believe in His name, He gave the right to become the children of God. <sup>13</sup> They have been born not of blood, or of an urge of the flesh, or of a husband's desire, but of God. <sup>14</sup> The Word became flesh and lived among us and we have seen His glory, the glory of the Father's only Son – He is full of grace and truth.

### **THE LIGHT HAS COME** **Sermon for Christmas Day 2023** **John 1:1-14**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Gospel read before, John 1:1-14: **In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> Everything was made through Him and not one thing that was made was made without Him. <sup>4</sup> In Him was life and the Life was the Light of mankind. <sup>5</sup> The Light is shining in the dark and the darkness has not understood it. <sup>6</sup> A man came, whom God sent and whose name was John. <sup>7</sup> He came to testify, that is, to testify about the Light so that through Him everyone might believe. <sup>8</sup> He was not the Light but came to witness about the Light. <sup>9</sup> The genuine Light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup> He was in the world and He made the world and the world did not know Him. <sup>11</sup> He came to His own and His own people did not receive Him. <sup>12</sup> However, to all who received Him, who believe in His name, He gave the right to become the children of God. <sup>13</sup> They have been born not of blood, or of an urge of the flesh, or of a**

husband's desire, but of God. <sup>14</sup> **The Word became flesh and lived among us and we have seen His glory, the glory of the Father's only Son – He is full of grace and truth.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth.  
Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

**“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.”** Do you remember what God made first in the beginning? What does the Scripture say? *“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the deep and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the water”* (Gen 1:1-2). Then God said, *“Let there be light!”* (1:3). There is no life without light. So, for God to transform this formless, dark void into a vital, active, magnificent world teeming with life, the first thing necessary was light. No light, no life.

Just as it is for the world in general, so it is for you and me. No light, no life. Just as in the beginning, the world was in darkness, so we are also not born in the light. We are born in darkness. I'm referring, of course, to a spiritual darkness. We are not born knowing God or able to love Him. We are not born with the ability to obey Him, serve Him, or even properly search for Him. We are born in darkness.

The Book of Isaiah describes this darkness in chapter 59: *“We hope for light but see darkness, for brightness but move about in gloom. We grope for a wall like blind people. We grope along like people without eyes. We have been stumbling at noon as in the twilight. We are like dead men among healthy people... We hope for... salvation but it is far from us. For our rebellious acts have become numerous in Your sight, and our sins have testified against us. For our rebellious acts are with us, and we acknowledge our wrongdoings”* (9-12).

We are no different from those of Isaiah's day. We are born alienated from God, unable to please Him, separated from Him by our sins, groping our way through life without direction and without hope - unless the light shines on us. And this darkness into which we are born is a total darkness; it is not dusk; this darkness is not twilight, and there is no moon shining. It's not just that it's difficult to make our way to God and to gain His favour. No, because of our sinful condition, it is impossible - unless the light shines on us.

But that is the celebration of Christmas, Light has come!

Not only that, but this Light has shined on us. Isaiah predicted it. He said, “*The people who were walking in darkness will see a bright Light. A Light will shine on those who were living in a land of deep darkness*” (9:2). Isaiah predicted it, and John described it. In our Gospel for this Christmas Day, John says, “**In Him was life and the Life was the Light of mankind. <sup>5</sup> The Light is shining in the dark and the darkness has not understood it.**”

Some 2,700 years ago, Isaiah predicted it; 2,000 years ago, John described it; today, we celebrate it. The Light of the world has come, and He has *come to us*. The Son of God became one of us, born of the Virgin Mary, and this little baby Jesus, born on Christmas Day, is the Light of the world. Jesus Himself said so. “*I am the Light of the world. He who follows Me will certainly not walk in the darkness but will have the light of life*” (John 8:12).

But what does this mean? How does the Light shine on us? What happens when this Light shines? The answer to that question comes in the climax of our text when the apostle John declares, “**The Word became flesh and lived among us and we have seen His glory, the glory of the Father’s only Son – He is full of grace and truth.**”

Yes, the Light came *when the eternal Son of God became flesh*. The little Baby in Mary’s arms is God, God the Son, God of God, and Light of Light. Imagine the wonder the shepherds must have felt when they went to Bethlehem to view the little Boy. The angel had told them that the One who had been born was the Lord. How they must have marvelled to see the Creator of all lying in a manger! But John says more. He didn’t come just to be born, John says. “**The Word became flesh and lived among us.**” And this He did for thirty-three years.

But John says even more. “**We have seen His glory, the glory of the Father’s only Son.**”

Now we begin to approach the answer to our question about what it means that Jesus is the Light of the world. John says he and the other disciples “**have seen His glory.**” They know what it is; they’ve seen it! And what is it? John tells us. “**He is full of grace and truth.**” This is the glory of Jesus. This is the glory John and the other disciples have seen. Jesus is “**full of grace and truth.**”

Have you ever been lied to in a way that’s hurt you? Jesus said, “*I am . . . the Truth*” (John 14:6). Have you ever been misled by a salesman or deceived by a friend or someone close to you? Jesus is the Truth. Even before His birth, misunderstandings are being cleared up. An angel appears to Mary and tells her she will have a child. She wonders how this can be since she is a virgin. The angel does not scold her for wondering but forthrightly tells her the truth.

*“The Holy Spirit will come over you . . . Therefore, also the Holy One who is conceived will be called ‘the Son of God.’”* (Luke 1:35). Again, an angel appears to Joseph in a dream and informs him that the child of Mary has been conceived by the Holy Spirit. There is to be no confusion about the conception and birth of this Child. Joseph must know the truth.

No one in the Scriptures is ever lied to about this Child. The shepherds are told the truth about the Child they were told to see: He is the Saviour and the Lord. Herod is told the truth by the Wise Men about the Child they are going to see: He is the King of the Jews. Simeon speaks the truth about the Child in his arms: He is the Saviour and the glory of Israel. When He, who is the Light of the world, appears, falsehood and deception are exposed, and the truth is revealed.

Jesus wants you to know that He speaks the truth. He *is* the Truth. When the Light of the world comes, everything is revealed for what it truly is. Wickedness and sin are exposed; nothing is hidden from Him. People may sing about Santa Claus, *“He knows when you’ve been sleeping; he knows when you’re awake. He knows if you’ve been bad or good.”* Of course, he doesn’t know any of these things. But Jesus does. When the Light comes into the world, everything is revealed to Him. False teaching and false prophets are exposed; false religions are revealed for what they are.

And the truth is revealed, the truth that saves. And what is that truth that saves? **“We have seen His glory, the glory of the Father’s only Son – He is full of grace and truth.”** The truth that saves is the message of His grace. The One who lies in the manger is the Saviour because He brings grace. As Jesus says later in the Gospel of John, *“For God has not sent His Son into the world to condemn the world but that the world may be saved through Him”* (3:17). This Baby whose birth we celebrate today is born to save, to bring forgiveness for all sin, to wash away guilt, to cover the shame and embarrassment of wrongdoing, and to bestow innocence and holiness on all who believe in Him.

We can’t forget this message as we celebrate Christmas. We do not just celebrate the birth of the Son of God. We also celebrate what He came to do. He was not born simply to be born - to show His solidarity with humanity. No, He was born to accomplish something. That’s why Satan sent Herod after that little Baby - not just because of who He was, but to prevent Him from accomplishing what He came to do. You see, He came to be our Substitute. He came to be what we were supposed to be - and were not, but He was. He came to do what we were supposed to do - and did not, but He did. He kept God’s Law perfectly for us. And He also came to suffer what we should have suffered.

*“He was pierced for our rebellious acts. He was bruised for our wrongdoings”* (Is 53:5). His suffering and death have atoned for all that was wrong about you and me. And through faith in Him, we now stand righteous and innocent in the eyes of the Father.

So celebrate today the birth of this Child, but celebrate also His life and His death and His resurrection. Celebrate both who He is and what He came to do. For then you will celebrate the birth of the One who is full of both grace and truth, and you will celebrate your own salvation and your own everlasting crown. Then you will properly celebrate what John describes in his Gospel, the coming of the true Light who came that you may become the children of God.

Yes, He is the eternal Word, the eternal God the Son, made flesh for us in order that His grace may shine on us. For He is the Light of the world born this Christmas day, the Light who shines grace, a grace that pours out God’s forgiveness on us, a grace that surrounds us with His love, a grace that crowns us with honour and glory for Jesus’ sake, a true unconditional grace that opens up for us an eternal life of joy. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.



## PRAYER FOR CHRISTMAS DAY

Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, with the angels and all the redeemed, we worship, praise, and thank You for all Your goodness. Especially we give thanks for Your Christmas gift to the world, Your own Son our Saviour, who has become man and lived among us, full of grace and truth.

Help us all to possess the true joys of this festival and to welcome the Saviour into our lives. Open our hearts to receive Him whom You have sent to us, so that we may know You and have eternal life, and may be Your special people, redeemed from all sin and eager to live in ways that glorify You.

We sing Your praises for the great miracle and mystery of Christmas: that He who was born in the manger is Lord of all. Grant that the whole world may kneel before the Manger Child, and know Him as Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace, so that His government over redeemed people may increase, and the influence of His peace may extend everywhere. Make His light shine on the nations, and especially direct all those in authority.

We glorify You for this supreme gift of Your Son. In Him give us all other blessings for this life and the life to come. Let the true light of Christmas shine on our homes, and bless all families through Him. Grant that every gift we make to each other may be more precious and meaningful because we know and remember this gift from You, which is beyond description, the Holy Child Jesus.

Put the light, peace, righteousness, and joy of this holy festival into the homes of the sad, the sick, the poor, the lonely, the dispossessed, the loveless, and the sinful. Let the Good News of triumphant life and hope in Jesus drive away all depression and despair. Make Your generous love shine through in the lives of all Your children. Help us to show compassion and generous love to all in need.

Loving Father, we offer our praise and thanksgiving before the manger-throne of Your Son Jesus. We offer our lives, our love, and our service to You in grateful devotion. So help, protect, and keep us through Him, that, when He comes in glory on the Last Day, we may rejoice and share in the perfect life and happiness of His eternal kingdom. Amen.

## **Article: Christmas and its season**

For early Christians, the Saviour's birth was second in importance only to His resurrection on Easter Sunday. Therefore, from earliest times, Christians paused to reflect on God's great and gracious gift of Himself. The date of Christmas, however, fluctuated among March 25, January 6, and December 25. December 25 was selected as the date perhaps because it coincided with a pagan winter solstice festival known as the birth of the invincible sun (*natalis solis invicti*). Christians quickly adapted this festival to the birth of the truly invincible Son of God, whom "the darkness has not overcome" (John 1:5).

However, some suggest another ancient reason to calculate December 25 as the date of Christ's birth, a reason that dates from the early fourth century. Citing the ancient belief that calculating the date of conception is more significant, some like to emphasise that an older tradition places the date of the annunciation on March 25, and December 25 is nine months after this date. The choice of March 25 as the date of the annunciation was calculated from the biblical narrative of Mary's visit to Elizabeth, which occurred after John the Baptist's conception. In addition, by following a somewhat mystical ancient logic in which famous persons were said to have lived in complete years, a person's death date was often considered to be his day of conception. Because the early Church calculated that the first Good Friday occurred on March 25, this way of thinking meant Christ was conceived on the same date. The earliest mention of Christmas as an official feast of the Christian community is from AD 354 in a list of commemorations primarily of martyrs from AD 336. The compiler of this list uses December 25 as the date of Jesus' birth.

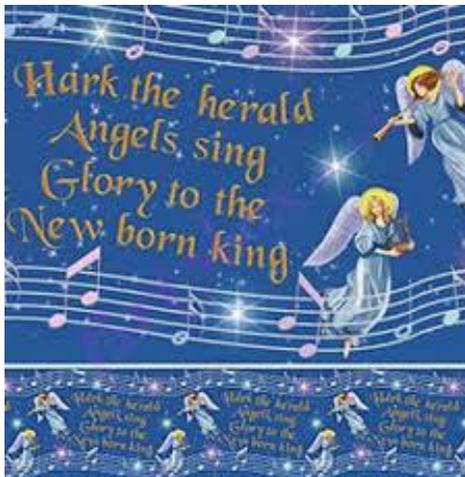
Despite what occurs in our commercial markets, the season of Christmas continues after December 25, a period known traditionally as the "Twelve Days of Christmas." This nearly two-week season includes a number of minor festivals: The Festival of St. Stephen, the first martyr, occurs on December 26. St. John, apostle and evangelist, is remembered on December 27. The death of the babies in Bethlehem is observed on December 28, which is the Festival of the Holy Innocents. The circumcision and naming of Jesus on the eighth day after His birth (Luke 2:21) is celebrated on January 1. The Christmas season culminates on January 6 with the most ancient nativity celebration, the Epiphany of our Lord.

## Children's Message:

Merry Christmas! Isn't this a wonderful day?

One of my favourite things about Christmas - even better than opening presents - is singing Christmas hymns. What are some of your favourite Christmas hymns, Christmas carols? I love "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing." You've heard of it, right? Sung it before? Does any one of you know it by heart, know all the words by memory - at least maybe the first verse?

Do you know what those words mean? "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing." Sometimes we say or sing words and go right along without even understanding what we're saying. "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing." What does "Hark!" mean? That's a word we don't use very often, isn't it? "Hark!" means "Listen! Listen up! I've got something very important that I want you to hear!" What about "herald angels"? You know what angels are,



but what are "herald angels"? A herald is someone who's sent by somebody else to announce, to tell us, something really important. So the "herald angels" are angels sent by God to tell us, to announce, something from God that's really important. "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" means God has sent these angels with something really important for us to hear, and they want us to listen up, because they're going to sing about it.

So, what's that really important thing God wants us to hear that the angels are going to sing about? Here's what the angels say: "*A Saviour, who is Christ, the Lord, has been born for you today, in the city of David... Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people whom He favours!*" (Luke 2:11, 14). And here's what that means: Jesus the Saviour is born! And because He's come, and because He's going to die on the cross, the sins that made us all enemies of God are forgiven; God isn't angry, but at peace with us. Listen up! "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" sings it like this: "Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!" *Dear Jesus, thank You for being born for me. I gladly join in with the angels singing of your coming! Amen.*

## WEEKLY ANNOUNCEMENTS

| 31 December<br>1 <sup>st</sup> Sunday after<br>Christmas                               | 1 January 2024<br>(Monday) | 7 January<br>The Baptism of Jesus                         |
|--|----------------------------|---|
|  |                            |   |
| 8.30am OAK LR<br>9.00am TMBA LR<br>9.00am GRN LR<br>9.30am AUB LR<br>9.00am MARBURG HC | 10.00am AUB HC             | 10.00am OAK HC<br>Parish Praise &<br>Thanksgiving Service |
| <b>Sunday, 31 December</b>   |                            |   |
| READINGS: Isaiah 61:10-62:3; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:22-40                             |                            |   |
| HYMNS: 46 30 4 (623 27) 741  |                            |   |
| <b>Monday, 1 January 2024</b>  |                            |   |
| READINGS: Numbers 6:22-27; Galatians 3:23-29; Luke 2:21                                |                            |   |
| HYMNS: 552 36 35 (161 840) 559   |                            |   |

Our student Patrick would like to get a youth group going in the new year, and would like to hear from anyone interested in attending and helping to make this happen. Please contact Patrick on 0403 005358 or at [patrickhensel95@gmail.com](mailto:patrickhensel95@gmail.com).

### FORWARD ANNOUNCEMENT:

January 7, 2024. Trinity Oakey will be celebrating the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their church building. The congregation wishes to hold a Praise and Thanksgiving service and would like to invite *all members of the parish to attend*. The service will be a 10.00am HC service, followed by a shared lunch. All offering envelopes will be returned to their own congregations.